

Independent Observer summary report on *MV Al Messilah*

Cattle and sheep exported to Kuwait, Qatar and United Arab Emirates in February 2019

Report 86, October 2019

Voyage summary

A consignment of 66,165 sheep 104 cattle and were loaded on the *MV Al Messilah* at the port of Fremantle on 22 and 23 February 2019. The vessel departed on 23 February 2019. The first discharge was at Kuwait between 9 and 10 March 2019, the second discharge was at the Port of Hamad, Qatar, between 11 and 13 March 2019. The final discharge was at Jebel Ali, United Arab Emirates on 14 March 2019. The total voyage length was 21 days.

An Independent Observer (observer) boarded the vessel at Fremantle and remained on-board until completion of discharge.

The mortality rate for sheep was 0.31% (209 mortalities). This does not exceed the reportable mortality rate. The causes of these mortalities were not considered to be linked to any systemic failure by the exporter. There were no cattle mortalities on the voyage.

The following comments represent a summary of key observations and has been approved by the observer who accompanied the voyage.

Independent observations of the implementation of procedures to ensure health and welfare of livestock

Exporter documentation

Exporter procedures were available to address livestock management from loading through to discharge and contingencies. Load planning documentation was provided to the observer.

Loading

The observer was present for some of the loading and noted that sufficient, competent personnel were available and that the animals were treated with due regard for their welfare.

Personnel

The Australian Government Accredited Veterinarian (AAV) on board was experienced and had previously worked on several live animal export voyages. The observer found the AAV to be dedicated and thorough, constantly checking pens for health and welfare issues.

The LiveCorp Accredited Stockperson (stockperson) on board had significant experience managing sheep and demonstrated a focus on the animal's welfare outcomes.

The master and Chief Officer (CO) were both very experienced and continually monitored the efforts of the livestock crew.

Crew duties included maintaining pen conditions, feed and water quality. The crew were observed to treat the animals with care and respect.

Daily routine

A management meeting was held each morning at 10:00am with the CO, AAV, stockperson and the observer. The meeting covered tasks for the day and dealt with any concerns raised by the ship's crew.

The crew worked from 07:00am to 06:00pm with breaks for meals. From 06:00pm to 07:00am crew members undertook four hour shifts as duty night watchman. The tasks included walking the decks continually and monitoring food and water troughs.

Feed and water

The vessel had an efficient mechanised feeding system which delivered pellets to all the decks using a chain drive. Parts of Deck 6 and part of Deck 10 required manual feeding. Feed was available to livestock almost continuously and no evidence of undue competition for food was observed.

Water for cattle and sheep was replenished daily by a reverse osmosis system that supplemented the water loaded at Fremantle. Water was continuously available to the livestock from float valve activated water troughs. The system was observed to work well and needed little ongoing maintenance, other than cleaning by the livestock crew.

The observer commented that there was ample trough space for food and water.

Ventilation

Ventilation was considered to be excellent on this voyage. The AAV and stockperson constantly monitored pens for adequate ventilation.

The animals did not exhibit any significant signs of heat stress on the voyage. As the voyage neared the equator, where average temperatures were higher, some animals were observed with elevated respiratory rates and a few animals with longer wool were heat affected and seen to open mouth pant. As the vessel approached the Gulf of Oman, respiratory rates returned to normal.

Pen conditions

The manure pads in each pen were monitored by all personnel and the AAV reported that most pads remained dry. Sawdust application was rarely required to be applied to manage pad quality.

The cattle pads became deep more quickly than the sheep pads. To manage this issue, the AAV directed crew to shovel out the pens on two occasions during the voyage. This strategy resulted in good pen and pad conditions for the cattle.

Health and welfare

The animals requiring treatment for wounds or lameness or those who were poor doers, were placed in nearby hospital pens. The AAV and stockperson both attended to these animals. Some of the shy feeder sheep were allowed to wander the alleyways once they had been assessed as not requiring hospitalisation.

The stocking density on the vessel allowed each animal 17.5% more space than required by the *Australian Standards for the Export of Livestock (Version 2.3) 2011* ([ASEL](#)). The observer noted this additional space provided excellent animal welfare outcomes over the voyage. All pens were observed to allow between 75 - 100% of animals to lie down simultaneously.

Around half of the sheep mortalities were found to have enteritis and inanition. The AAV and the stockperson displayed sound judgement when they were required to euthanise animals that were unresponsive to treatment, or which were too far advanced to consider treatment.

The observer noted that the AAV, stockperson, ships officers and crew all demonstrated a high priority towards animal health and welfare on this voyage.

Discharge

Some sawdust was placed in the alleyways prior to and during discharge.

Other

The AAV stored and used veterinary drugs as per manufacturer's recommendations and maintained records of treatments. The AAV provided accurate daily reports to the department.

Conclusion

The observer determined that the implementation of procedures relating to the management of livestock exported by sea were consistent with the ASEL requirements.

Representative photographs of the voyage

Day 3 sheep in pen—no issues identified



Day 4 cattle in pen—no issues identified



Day 11 sheep in pen—no issues identified



Day 12 sheep feeding—no issues identified



Day 13 sheep in pen—no issues identified



Day 15 sheep in pen—no issues identified

